

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Step Five: To Patience Godliness

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9, KJV 1900)

In our last study, I used the term "heart obedience" in contrast with a superficial external pretense of obedience. This "heart obedience," profound obedience to the Lord that grows from a heart that single-mindedly loves Him and seeks above all else to glorify Him in what we think and do, is essential to the quality of "godliness" that we now examine. Godliness defines attitudes and behaviors that mirror the character of God, specifically the attitudes and behaviors that we see in Jesus during His Incarnation, His time of living in a human body among men. In First Peter 2:21-23, Peter directs us to the godly example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He includes five lively examples in which Jesus serves as our example. However, His example is not one that we may volunteer to follow or choose to ignore. His example in Scripture becomes the basis for the Biblical commandment to godliness in our personal attitudes and conduct. Review these verses and identify the five behaviors that Peter used to nudge us to godliness.

Often in the New Testament letters, a thorough examination of the complete letter will reveal far more structure in the material contained than we usually consider. For example, this principle of godliness appears as major "Bookends" at the beginning and the ending of this letter. Here are the two verses that mark out Peter's second letter's most prominent lesson to and for us.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3, KJV 1900)

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. (2 Peter 3:11, KJV 1900)

An impatient disposition undermines our faith-walk and endangers any progress in godliness. In fact, it more predicts a regression in godliness than growth. If we faithfully build our lives in the model of this progression, we are on our way to faithful conduct that glorifies our God and brings godly fruit

to perfection. So far the progression has taken us from the foundation of faith through virtue, knowledge, temperance, and patience. Only after we have imbedded these principles in our life are we equipped, truly equipped, to begin to practice godliness in a meaningful way.

The interlinking manner in which each trait listed in our study list appears clearly in this setting. If we fail to grow the spirit of patience in trials, our impatient, impetuous disposition will take over our life and lead us into many snares that destroy our fruitfulness to our Lord, as well as our aid to other believers who live around us. Godliness defines a fixed behavior that patiently endures the trial as Jesus endured His trials, and, while trusting in our God's faithfulness, cultivates in us actual conduct that glorifies God as we endure the trail.

A habitual lifestyle of godliness stifles our carnal appetites. It identifies the opposite and openly hostile forces within us that frame the conflict between good and evil, between the flesh and the spirit (our regenerated spirit in union with the indwelling Holy Spirit). Compromising the principle of godliness means that we surrender our spiritual war against the enemy without resistance. Early in my ministry, one of my fathers in ministry told of an experience early in his ministry. One day as he arrived at a church meeting and was greeting the people on the outside of the building before service started, he was shocked by an older minister who did not enjoy a good reputation as a preacher. By reputation, he apparently had not studied or otherwise applied himself so as to make his gift edifying to people. The old man saw my friend and blurted out, "Here comes that smart aleck young preacher." Momentarily overcome by anger, my friend replied, "Sir, I can out preach you any day." Nothing more was said. About three or four months later both men attended a special meeting. On one afternoon the pastor announced the preaching arrangements for the service. The old preacher was to fill the pulpit first, and my friend was to follow. My friend told me that, to the amazement of everyone in the congregation, the old man really preached a powerful, edifying sermon. When he finished his sermon, he turned to my friend, and

spoke loudly so that everyone in the auditorium clearly heard his words, "Now, young preacher. Beat that. You said you could." I could think of few things as embarrassing and disconcerting as my friend faced at this moment. What did he do? He smiled and told me that he humbly told the congregation of the episode behind the comment, readily and publicly confessed his personal angry haste in his comment, and then he read his text and prayed for the Lord to give him preaching grace. My friend's confession of his fault is a wise example of godliness that transcends virtue.

In our day, failure to pay one's debts has become far more acceptable than Scripture allows. Based on Romans 13:8, we may owe a debt, but only if we in fact do faithfully repay it. Anyone who professes to be a believer in the Lord Jesus and who negligently and intentionally fails to pay his/her debts dishonors and disgraces that worthy name.

While we do not normally see the word "Steward" in contemporary dialogue, we live with the concept all around us. A first century Jewish steward managed his master's property and/or business. He was responsible for the safe keeping and profit of something that didn't belong to him. If you work for a business that you do not own, your employment responsibilities, in effect your job description, defines your "Stewardship" responsibilities toward your employer. Does your employer view you as being the most trustworthy and diligent employee on his payroll?

The same principle applies to our conversation and to every other role we fill in our routine life. While we interact with other people and report to them, supervise them, or work with them as peers, we usually face the superior in our employment and receive a performance review. The supervisor will mention strong points as well as areas that need improvement. Think of that review as an assessment of your stewardship to your employer. However, we should live every moment on the payroll of this business as a greater stewardship to our Lord. (Colossians 3:23) Even if the human employer is pleased with our performance, how would we measure up if the Lord sat on the other side of the desk and gave us His assessment of our actual obedience? When our life is characterized by godliness, along with all of the traits and behaviors leading up to godliness in our study passage, we are on our way to profitableness in our stewardship assignment from Him. We read this principle in Scripture, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:23) Peter set the stage for this key behavior at the beginning of this letter.

*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto **life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. (2 Peter 1:3; emphasis added)*

When we fail to practice the traits of godliness, we can never blame God for our failure. While Peter reminded his first century readers, he also reminds us that our Lord has given to us all things that pertain to both life and to godliness. Our failure to practice godliness is never due to God's neglect or to any shortage of His provisions to us. He has made everything that we need for the habit of godliness available to us. But take note. We lay hold on these things as we build our knowledge, our sound, Biblical knowledge of Him and of His Word. Choose to live your discipleship out in ignorance, and your discipleship will be a superficial pretense, not the "Real thing." As you grow in sound knowledge, you also grow in your understanding of those things that the Lord has given to you and charged you to use in your life, to use as His good stewards. Those things do not cease to be His possession, but He makes them available to us on the basis of stewardship. Think of all seven traits listed by Peter in our study passage as so many components of God's wise stewardship to us, to be developed and applied to our lives for His kingdom profit. Use His gifts wisely so that, at any time, you may give Him a report of faithful and fruitful use of what He gave to you in stewardship.

Take wise note. Bible lists such as the one we now study are never redundant. They never repeat the same thing, though we may misread words and think so. Consider this list. The first addition in Peter's list is virtue. Now at Step Five we encounter godliness. Most of us likely think of these two words as almost identical. Surely if you are virtuous, you are also godly. Not so, I suggest, given Peter's use of the words in this list. A believer may be admirably virtuous in his conduct, and yet fall miserably short in being godly. How so? He may live the moral principles of God's commandments, but fail in godly acts of mercy, kindness toward his brothers and sisters, and forgiveness. He may think that he knows every key word and trait of Biblical virtue, but he may despise—at least in his personal conduct—a key ingredient of godliness that Scripture consistently emphasizes, submission to one's brothers and sisters, and, when disagreements occur on non-essential or non-spiritual matters, respect for their ideas above one's own. (Philippians 2:1-8) Many a believer, even preachers, destroy their fruitful lives by trying to leave a personal legacy to their work in their senior years, instead of faithfully continuing to build the legacy of the Lord Jesus Christ in their faith-walk. Failure in these matters leaves a virtuous believer in the embarrassing and deficient, unfruitful role of being an ungodly believer!

Go back to First Peter 2:21-23, write down those five principles of the "Jesus example," and then score yourself on your compliance with them, as well as this list. The process will likely be disappointing, perhaps even a bit shocking, but it will also guide you in the need to grow from virtue into mature, Christ glorifying godliness.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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